



Education for a Circular Economy



Supported by

Interface[®]

It has been widely acknowledged that the way we manufacture and consume goods through the traditional industrial economy puts significant pressure on the earth's resources.

The linear model of manufacture, use and dispose is out-dated as businesses see the environmental and economic benefits of adopting a circular economy. This means using waste as a future raw material, minimising environmental impact and ensuring we take the maximum value from all resources we use. In doing so, we can take a sustainable and restorative approach by recovering and regenerating products at the end of each lifecycle.

Taking this restorative, circular approach means we can have a positive impact environmentally, socially and economically alike.

All sectors, including education, are becoming acutely aware of the importance of shifting to a restorative framework like this. For universities, this means taking a more considered approach to sustainability, and understanding how they can have a positive impact on our planet's resources.



How can circular thinking drive sustainability in the education sector?

Earlier this year, Liz Goodwin, chief executive at WRAP - a leading authority on sustainable resource management, stated 'there is still too much talk and not enough action when it comes to implementing a circular economy'.

In the 2014/15 school year, it was reported that 322,000 tonnes of waste was disposed of by UK higher education institutions¹. While many universities are now promoting a circular economy on an academic level, educators can also create a positive environmental impact by reviewing where they can minimise waste and utilise more sustainable products and services in the management of their campus buildings.

For example, specifying products from manufacturers that implement a circular economy model through a closed loop production process can benefit on an environmental and economic level. The closed loop system may enable businesses and universities to avoid rising costs of materials in the long term due to increasingly scarce resources, and could also have a huge impact on the sustainability credentials of a university.

Sustainability is becoming increasingly prominent in the education sector. More institutions are now setting green targets, while a growing number of students are also showing a desire for transparency surrounding the environmental credentials of their universities. As a result, education providers are looking for new ways to reduce their carbon footprint. One way many universities are doing this is by developing relationships with innovative supply partners who are pushing the boundaries in their manufacturing processes. These manufacturers can offer sustainable products and services without compromising on the end product or price tag.



¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/component/content/article?id=2093>

Insight Guide



A Truly Circular Economy

Interface, the global modular flooring manufacturer, became one of the first companies to publically commit to sustainability - and putting back more than it takes out from the environment - in 1994 when it embarked on 'Mission Zero'.

Mission Zero is an open commitment to eliminate any negative impact the company has on the environment by the year 2020, and has already achieved dramatic results. At its European manufacturing sites, Interface has reduced GHG emissions by 98 per cent, water use by 98.5 per cent and achieved zero waste to landfill since 1996. In addition, Interface is currently operating with 95 per cent renewable energy and uses 50 per cent renewable or biobased materials in the manufacture of its products.



Through continuous innovation in products and processes, Interface has also developed several business models to achieve a truly circular economy.

Case Study: Net-Works®

One example of the circular economy in practise is the Net-Works® programme – a result of Interface's collaboration with the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and yarn manufacturer, Aquafil. Net-Works® is an inclusive business model that enables fishing communities in developing countries to sell their waste fishing nets back into a global supply chain. So far, 100,000kg of fishing nets have been collected through the programme in the Philippines. This has subsequently established a reliable source of recycled nylon fibre that Interface now uses in the manufacture of its carpet tiles. In fact, the programme inspired Interface's global Net Effect™ collection – just one of Interface's products that uses 100 per cent recycled yarn. Net-Effect™ provides a subtle visual reminder of the sea on its surface, with a design reminiscent of swirling currents.



The Net-Works® programme has created far-reaching economic opportunities for some of the world's poorest communities, helping them to develop infrastructure to support services such as education and banking. Net-Works® has provided over 500 families with access to finance as well as offering a meaningful incentive to conserve local marine ecosystems in the long-term.

An integral factor in initiatives of this kind is transparency and ensuring that all parties can better understand the impact of problematic materials. Working with suppliers that are transparent about their products helps universities to take a more proactive approach when it comes to reducing the negative impact they have on the environment.

Partnerships like Net-Works® are successful because the recognition of the problem and the ultimate goal – to find ways of manufacturing more sustainable products from creation to end of life – are the same.

Insight Guide



Creating a Closed Loop System

Taking a more considered approach to a material's life cycle, and what happens to it at the end of its life in particular, is key to universities becoming a part of a fully functioning closed loop system. In a closed loop system, materials and products deemed to be at the end of their 'useful' lifecycles would go on to create something new. Collaboration between universities and manufacturers has the ability to help divert materials like these from the landfill and avoid the harvesting of virgin materials.

The ReEntry® programme delivered by Interface is a working example of a carpet reclamation service which takes old carpet away once it reaches the end of its life and recycles it to make new product. In 2012, ReEntry® successfully diverted 6,723 tonnes of carpet and carpet scraps from landfills. Embracing services like these would enable any university to redefine their traditional notion of waste and give the products it uses a more circular lifecycle.



Interface is just one example of a manufacturer that is embracing innovation and collaboration to transform waste from something negative to something that has a positive impact on the world. By putting a focus on the re-use of waste as a key aspect of the circular economy - choosing suppliers that are transparent and using products that are developed sustainably - educators can play their part in creating a future that is about more than being sustainable, but about being completely restorative.

Further information

- <http://www.interface.com/EU/en-GB/homepage>
- <http://net-works.com/>
- <http://www.interface.com/US/en-US/about/modular-carpet-tile/Interface-EPDs>

Disclaimer: The information presented here provides an overview of Circular Economy. Please note that all information contained within this guidance is correct at the time publication in October 2016.